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ABSTRACT

Guided Design has great potential as a teaching/learning method for Women's Studies courses. The Guided Design process is organized around the learner's efforts to come up with solutions to a series of carefully designed, open-ended problems. The problems are selected by the teacher according to the skills and subject matter to be learned. The teacher also prepares written instruction-feedback material intended to guide the students, working in small groups, through a sequence of decision-making steps to a model solution. As a technique for teaching Women's Studies, Guided Design builds self-esteem, requires specific participation in a creative learning environment with a flexible structure, encourages critical thinking based on interdisciplinary research conducive to solving open-ended problems, provides nonauthoritarian instruction, and develops skills in the areas of communication and leadership. It integrates the teaching of subject matter with the development of decision-making skills applied to real life situations. (This paper includes the table of contents from a handbook developed for a Guided Design course on Sex Equality and Religion, and lists both the decision-making steps to be followed and the course objectives.) (CMG)

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GUIDED DESIGN AS A WOMEN'S STUDIES METHOD

Helen R. Trobian

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GUIDED DESIGN AS A WOMEN'S STUDIES METHOD

Introduction - Teaching Synergetic Strategies

The interdisciplinary studies degree program at Bennett College was initiated in 1971 with assistance from the National Endowment for the Humanities. A general education phase of that degree included an externship, a problem seminar, and new courses entitled Perception and Aesthetics, Speech and Forensics, Mass Media and four semesters of Synergetic Strategies. Synergetic Strategies was taught as an experimental workshop with two professors and a teaching assistant. There were twenty-one students who had committed themselves to becoming candidates for the B.A. and S. in Interdisciplinary Studies. Twenty had received all-expense scholarships. Our effort in the first year of Synergetic Strategies was to engage the students in continuously designing their own curriculum and evaluating each aspect. At that time the college did not have a Women's Studies Program. One successful experiment integrated three interrelated fields of study--Integrative Concepts, Ethnic Studies, and Women's Studies. Students were divided into three groups of seven members each with functional roles assigned: chairperson, seminar director, bibliographer, publications editor, recorder/reporter coordinator of library research, coordinator of field search. While each member of the group was assigned her special role, each also was expected to engage in the work of other members.

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The experiment started with a cross-pollination technique. Our bulletin for students explained:

> The idea is to start off with a plurality of concepts, one to each of the three groups. They may be strategic reference frames of the interdisciplinary degree program, or in the nature of meta-discipline areas of concern--reflecting a selected number of bodies of knowledge. Starting with some suggested multiple problems, issues, or themes, each of the three groups can develop its own content while at the same time taking an active interest in what the other two groups are doing. This is considerably more than merely being knowledgeable of their work.
>
> The technique is for each group to have three projects in process at a time, two of which have been suggested by the other two groups and one of its own origination. These projects will reflect the climate of learning provided, as well as the work of individual learners. Each student will be working in committee, two committees to a group, and on three projects--one originating from other groups, one from the group to which she is a member, and one of her own origination. In this way the main effort will be on what interests the scholar and her immediate group while an active interest is kept up day to day in work originating from the other two groups.
>
> At the end of approximately three weeks each group is expected to present a seminar before all student of the interdisciplinary degree program, to which the campus community and the public may be invited. This seminar will provide the participants an opportunity to share their learnings and to lead participants in discussion before an audience. These seminars will be planned and prepared by each group but any one group may involve as many persons from each of the other groups as they may wish to invite. They may also, with the approval of the staff, invite guest consultants from on or off campus.

The teaching staff served as consultants and with group chairpersons served as a steering committee. The three members of the staff also assumed functional roles for "direction of writing," "direction of modification," and "direction of resources." Called a poly-disciplinary component we informed the students that the experiment was designed to provide "dynamic flexibility within a stabilizing structure." The bulletin for students further elaborated the philosophy of the experiment.

By this method we may draw freely from established disciplines as we make inquiries concerning contemporary issues and it provides a means of synthesizing knowledge and integrating educational experiences.

We are equally concerned with thought, feeling, and action. Cognitive knowing is fine, active knowing is better, and aesthetic creative knowing is best. All of these are needed for a synergetic movement to bring about a wider spectrum. The scholar needs to perceive appropriate relationships among ideas. She needs to sense the meaning and the significance of her feelings, and to develop abilities, skills, and courses of action which are guided by comprehensive knowledge and thought and by disciplined feelings. She needs also to achieve continuously new and better perspectives for qualitative perceptions in order for her to expand as a person. For creative new understandings to occur she must respond, contribute, interpret, self-understand, and practice procedures both alone and in groups in such ways that all these processes are continuously 'adding up'.

This experiment reflects the interest of our group in three inter-related areas of fields of study -- Integrative Concepts, Ethnic Studies, and Women's Studies. The word integration refers to both a state and a process; it assumes the existence of parts which can be so related as to make a whole. A set of related facts may yield a generalization of principle. Relating this principle to other facts or principles may yield a still more general principle or possibly a theory. Integration involves the adjustment, the proper relationship of part to part, part to whole, and whole to part, and the combining of these parts into a complex of levels. An integrative "thread" is any idea, problem, method, or device by which two or more separate learning experiences are related.

Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies are closely related on a campus that has a library housing a unique collection of books on Afro-American Women, has the Six-Institution Consortium offices, and numerous other facets and phases of Black Studies. Although we are a college for women we too are concerned with the newest findings under the heading of Women's Studies and desire to make our contribution to this area of educational endeavor and social action.

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Guided Design - "part system, part attitude"

Having had a reasonable degree of success with most aspects of our "poly-disciplinary component" we continued to experiment with various ways of setting up learning climates. Several years of Synergetic Strategies with continuous efforts at coordinating students' self-esteem maintenance with their efforts toward scholarship, had encouraged us to examine the teaching method called Guided Design. We submitted a proposal to the Exxon Education Foundation's IMPACT Program and obtained a small grant for production of curricular materials utilizing the Guided Design approach. Another Interdisciplinary Studies professor and I then attended a workshop at West Virginia University where we were introduced to the techniques of combining open-ended problem-solving with a type of programmed learning and decision-making skills as developed by Dr. Charles E. Wales and others. The brochure distributed by the Exxon Foundation described Guided Design as "part system, part attitude." (Note sexist language.)

> It reshapes the traditional approach to higher education from the ground up by having students, working in small groups, attack problems rather than masses of cold information. It is based on the conviction that the student can be brought to acquire whatever factual or technical knowledge he needs as he works his way through an ascending order of well-designed problems. The central idea behind all this is that the student who is actively seeking solutions to problems rather than passively assimilating knowledge will emerge not only better educated but far stronger intellectually.

This month, May 28-30, 1980, West Virginia University has announced a National Conference on "Teaching Decision-Making: Guided Design 1980". The announcement describes Guided Design in this manner.

> Guided Design is an educational strategy that makes it possible for teachers to simultaneously accomplish two goals which have stubbornly resisted integration: 1) teaching subject matter and 2) developing the decision-making skills required to apply what has been learned to the solution of real world problems. With Guided Design, the teacher models professional reasoning and shows learners how the material they study can be used to make better decisions. A by-product of this process is increased motivation which improves the learners' retention of subject matter.
>
> The learning process in Guided Design is organized around the learners' efforts to devise solutions for a series of carefully designed open-ended problems. While there is no single correct answer to any of these problems, each requires learners to put into play specific information studied outside of class in order to develop a feasible solution. The teacher selects the problems according to the skills and subject matter the learners are expected to use and prepares written instruction-feedback material which guides them through a "model" solution.

The Exxon brochure states the advantages of Guided Design.

> By focusing on problem-solving rather than the traditional role acquisition of knowledge, Guided Design brings knowledge alive as the tool of an active mind seeking orderly solutions to complex problems. The open-ended nature of Guided Design problems and the stress on group problem-solving brings this approach even closer to "real" experience, where few problems are susceptible to a single, black or white solution and where many different opinions and values must be considered and reconciled in the decision-making process. In sum, students not only acquire knowledge within the discipline under the Guided Design approach, but also develop their ability to learn on their own, think logically, gather the information they need to make intelligent decisions, and communicate their ideas to others.

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Sex Equality and Religion: An Example of a Guided Design Women's Studies Project

My own experience consists of creating two projects with another professor, Dr. Ruth M. Lucier: Sex Equality and Religion and Bioethics and Research. For each project a spiral bound HANDBOOK was made available to each student. The HANDBOOKS included hypothetical case-story situations (referred to as "soap operas") and other pertinent material such as alternative assignments, bibliography, objectives, an overview of the project, media resources, and optional individual research activities or parallel projects. They also included an explanation of the decision-making sequence used in the project. They do not include the Instruction and Feedback pages available during the class sessions. When the work on each Instruction is completed the group may request the next Feedback and Instruction. By this method each group works through a sequence of steps from first identifying the problem(s) to a solution or final evaluation.

Using Sex Equality and Religion as an example contents of the HANDBOOK are listed here.

C O N T E N T S

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Introduction to the study of religion	ii
Introduction to *Sex Equality and Religion: an issue in justice, liberty, and human values*	iii
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Course Objectives and Decision Steps	v
1 - Introduction to Group Situation (Story)	1
2 - Preliminary Directions for Study Groups	5
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4 - Historical Readings - Attitudes Toward Roles of Women in Church and Society	7
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The introduction to the project gives a concise summary and lists the decision-making steps in relation to Sex Equality and Religion: an issue in justice, liberty, and human values.

The sacred dimension of human experience concerns both the individual and society. Human values find a basis in religious values.

This mini-course is a Guided Design Project modelling how a controversial issue (with personal, theological, historical, sociological, psychological, and political implications) could be assessed by a group concerned with understanding the traditional, culturally sanctioned, structures, attitudes, and practices in religious institutions. The course will involve the participants in deciding what changes, if any, need to be made.

The following steps are involved in this approach:

1) Identify the problem(s) related to sex-role stereotyping in institutionalized religions.

2) Gather information concerning stereotyped sex-roles.

3) Analyze differences in roles.

4) Generate possible solutions to experiences of inequality.

5) Specify the constraints limiting the solutions proposed.

6) Preliminary evaluation deciding on the most feasible solution.

7) Identify a new problem and

8) Gather information for additional specific evidence on the problem.

9) Analyze the information compiled on sex-role stereotyping and male domination in churches.

10) Generate possible solutions for ways to lessen sexism in religion.

11) Synthesize the decision-making process leading toward acceptance and/or transcendence of sex stereotyped roles in religion.

12) Evaluate the approach made by a student group studying a social issue in institutionalized religion.

Course objectives are listed in relation to decision-making steps and are correlated with the Instructions and Feedbacks.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The general objectives to be met by the decision-making process are to:	Steps (Instructions & Feedbacks) correlated with objectives:
1) discover how sexual attitudes (sex-role stereotyping and language usage) are part of framing religious values	1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9.
2) explore perspectives for amelioration of assigned roles of men and women in our religious and cultural heritage	1, 4, 5, 6, 10.
3) gather information from multi-disciplinary sources about factors inherent in the problems of transforming cultural stereotypes	2, 8.
4) generate possible solutions by examining the history of the problem and viewing various perspectives as seen by scholars, writers, and professional practitioners	4, 10.
5) analyze contemporary methods for redefining existing human values and social roles	3, 5, 9.
6) synthesize and evaluate a series of possible activities conducive to justice, liberty, and equality in institutionalized religion	6, 11, 12.

The "story" follows and members of the group become, in essence, members of the hypothetical group situation. The "story" continues throughout the Feedback and Instruction pages. The feedback gives some possible responses (not necessarily the best) that the students in the story-situation gave. The purpose of the feedback is to further stimulate each group's discussion by giving them ideas to compare with their own.

For Sex Equality and Religion we wrote a story-situation revolving around a group of college students. One young woman asked the Chaplain why he had never invited a woman to lead a chapel service. Following an inadequate answer a group of seven young men and women initiated a study group on the nature of sexism in religion and worked their way through the decision-making steps. It was easy for our students to imagine that they were members of the story-group, especially since some of the fictional characters were prone to make humorous remarks along with their serious study.

Comparison with Nature of Evidence Course

Dr. Gene D'Amour, who assisted us at the workshop attended at West Virginia University, describes the students in a Guided Design class as working in

> small groups to solve meaningful, open-ended problems which require them to think logically, gather information, communicate ideas and work through certain decision-making steps.....

> The students do the thinking, they must make value judgments, and they play the role of the professional decision-maker.
> In the Guided Design systems approach each open-ended problem establishes a need for a unit of subject matter which each student is expected to learn, on his own, outside of class. This approach helps the student learn the facts, concepts and principles that are part of the background information required for the decision-making process. In addition, this organization establishes a pattern which will serve the student well after he leaves school, where continued independent learning is prerequisite to sucess. . . In the Guided Design system the primary role of the teacher is that of guide, prompter, reinforcer and consultant. During class the teacher moves from group to group listening, asking leading questions and encouraging the students to participate in the decision-making process.[1]

Dr. D'Amour has established a multi-disciplinary philosophy of science course entitled 'The Nature of Evidence'. Twelve scholarly faculty members represented the fields of Biology, Chemistry, Anthropology, English, Philosophy, Psychology, Geology, History, Physica, Drama, Engineering, Education, and Political Science. Working as a committee these twelve

> decided that the best way to present the evidential strategies of the various disciplines to the student was to demonstrate how each of these strategies might be applied to the solution of a simple, realistic problem. Desiring to maintain continuity among the problems, it was decided that all problems would arise in the context of an actual experimental village in Tanzania called Rwamkoma.[2]

Dr. D'Amour says that the primary objective of 'The Nature of Evidence' course is

> to help the student learn about the similarities and differences that exist between the ways in which different professionals in the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities gather evidence and use it to make decisions. The secondary objective is to instill in the student a certain attitude, namely, a penchant for basing their beliefs on evidence and for opening those beliefs to criticism. At the same time it is hoped that the student can be introduced to some subject matter in the particular disciplines being compared and contrasted.[3]

In line with this educational philosophy he continues -

> the Geologist was concerned with finding new sources of badly needed water; the Anthropologist had to overcome cultural beliefs which were limiting meat, egg, and milk consumption, leading to malnutrition; the specialist in English was grappling with the problem of whether or not a purported pornographic poem, which had created great concern in the village since it was written by one of the villagers, had any literary value.[4]

The course commences with a project on educational systems design and introduces the decision-making process. Basic techniques from philosophy are then used

> to develop a set of questions about the methods, achievements, and attitudes of the scientist, questions such as 'Does the scientist make predictions?', 'Does his work lead to the discovery of novel facts?' and 'Is he open to criticism?' These questions were used throughout the rest of the course to compare the work of professionals in different disciplines.[5]

After the students dealt with projects from the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities they were asked to use the questions developed in the philosophy project "to examine the way in which the professional had operated."[6]

> By doing this they learned about such things as the different types of explanatory models used in the natural and social sciences, the different types of ethical and operational constraints involved in testing hypotheses, and the different ways in which each professional opened his beliefs to criticism.[7]

At Bennett College in addition to our own projects, we have used the Anthropology project from the Nature of Evidence course as a Guided Design unit in one of our Synergetic Strategies courses. This has enabled us to make a comparison with our projects that were prepared with a Women's Studies orientation.

I could imagine a Women's Studies course patterned after the Nature of Evidence course idea. A group of professors representing a number of disciplines might cooperatively develop their own set of Guided Design projects demonstrating "evidential strategies" from their respective disciplines and in each instance modelling the work of professionals but geared toward new value judgments. Some basic questions from the field of ethics might serve as initial criteria, for comparison between disciplines, and for final evaluative study of the entire course.

Conclusion

Methods for use in Women's Studies courses need to reflect interdisciplinarity. Not only has each discipline demonstrated its sexism but as Carolyn Sherif, a social psychologist who has spent many years in interdisciplinary work says, "it has to become interdisciplinary in

order to define its focal problems of study."[8] In listing the advantages that feminist scholarship has over earlier interdisciplinary efforts Dr. Sherif mentions that there is intense motivation because 1) "The issues bear on our lives. We are the victims of narrow parochialisms." 2) As a movement toward equality we have a more fundamental faith. 3) We have less to lose because we are essentially in the position of 'outsiders'. 4) Previous failures of the human disciplines make this "a time optimal for effective interdisciplinary impact."[9] She continues:

> At least part of the crisis state of the human disciplines reflects their utter failures in the face of rapid changes underway around the world. And it is here that feminism should stake its claim, for it can be nothing unless it takes the problems of personal, social, collective, and institutional change as its focus. Feminism is, indeed, a product of past and present, but its realization is for the future."[10]

We have found in our interdisciplinary teaching that interdisciplinarity is of necessity constantly involved in a dynamic, organic process. New insights emerge and as they are shared they generate new experiences. The preamble to the Constitution of the National Women's Studies Association refers to

> a history of creative struggle to evolve knowledge, theory, pedagogy, and organizational models appropriate to that vision,

and the preamble closes with a commitment to

> equipping women not only to enter society as whole and productive human beings, but to transform it.

To equip students to participate in social change college courses need to provide opportunities for developing self-confident, persuasive communication and research skills. This is best done in situations where an area of experimentation can occur within a large area of structure. It is natural to Women's Studies courses to alleviate the hierarchical classroom structure. Rather than an authoritarian teacher the professor has both an obligation and the right to serve as a catalytic leader who sets up a climate of learning and continues to learn along with the students.

Since our patriarchal heritage has inhibited women in the classroom and subject matter has been conditioned by a male paradigm it takes a deliberate effort to find ways to introduce effective methods by which students can interact while researching information and developing attitudes based on new value judgments.

As a teaching method Guided Design permits the professor (or group leader) to prepare in advance selected up-to-date problems incorporating a particular sequence of original up-dated materials. Working in small groups students discover that they must express their opinions and find necessary information in order to progress through the decision-making stages. Various types of materials and methods are made available for students to consult. It is possible to include skits, debates, demonstrations, guest speakers. Professors serve as consultants or resources.

For each stage of problem-solving each group is given written instruction and feedback materials that guide them toward their final evaluation of a feasible solution. Guided Design is a means of involving students in discussion based on individual and group research. It models professional behaviour while teaching decision-making skills and relating to real life situations. Large groups, by being divided into smaller groups, can be managed by one professor and student assistants.

As a technique for teaching Women's Studies courses it builds self-esteem, requires specific participation, encourages critical thinking, involves interdisciplinary research conducive to solving open-ended problems, and provides non-authoritarian instruction. Women's Studies courses can create a milieu in which the school can, as Robert Theobald desires, teach people the ability to

> - look at a defined situation and to make good decisions about the best ways to deal with that situation, while being aware of the interconnections with other areas of their lives and those of others as well as the patterns of risk involved in any decision-making;
>
> - look at a situation and to come up with imaginative and creative ideas about the ways in which that situation can be changed, for the better, so that all those involved in it have more chances of meeting their purposes and their goals;
>
> - distinguish between situations where it is wise to work within current realities and those which can only be resolved on the basis of creative thinking and significant change.[11]

NOTES

[1]Gene D'Amour, "The Philosopher as Teacher," Metaphilosophy, Vol. 8, No.1, January 177, p. 81.

[2]D'Amour, p. 82.

[3]D'Amour, p. 82.

[4]D'Amour, p. 82.

[5]D'Amour, p. 83.

[6]D'Amour, p. 83.

[7]D'Amour, p. 84.

[8]Carolyn Wood Sherif, "Climbing Disciplinary Walls and Learning How to Borrow," Women's Studies International Quarterly, Vol. 1 (1978), p. 219.

[9]Sherif, pp. 223-224.

[10]Sherif, p.224.

11 Robert Theobald, "Creating a Desirable Educational System," Educational Technology, April 1980, p. 23.